

AROUND THE CORPS IN BRIEF

Gas scenario prepares Marines for worst

POHAKULOA TRAINING AREA, ISLAND OF HAWAII, Hawaii — Marines here got hands-on experience of what a real gas attack would be like during a weapons of mass destruction exercise Feb. 4. Warriors from Combat Service Support Group 3 arrived at the scene to investigate reports of WMD in full Mission Oriented Protective Posture 4 gear. There was a possibility an attack would occur, so weapons were brought along, as well as chemical detection equipment, individual protective equipment and a security team.

Staff Sgt. Caleb D. Eames, NBC chief for CSSG-3, said it was the first time this group of Marines practiced a WMD incident. The scenario prepared the group for response to real-world threats.

Opposing forces waited for Marines to call “all clear” after inspecting the area. Then “CS” grenades were tossed into the area, releasing a gas and simulating the appearance of a blister agent. The Marines acted quickly, donning their gear and getting into a defensive position.

The operation’s decontamination team then arrived to ensure that contamination was eliminated, and the mission could continue.

Corporal Travis R. Eiklor, an NBC specialist with CSSG-3, played the role as one of the aggressors during the exercise.

“It was really great to catch the Marines by surprise and force them to make decisions on their own,” he said. “It reinforces that they know what they’re doing and gives them confidence in the end.”

This training is a small part of larger operations that will take place for the Marines at the Pohakuloa Training Area.

Fighting 13th stops down under for liberty

DARWIN, Australia — Marines and sailors aboard the USS Peleliu and USS Germantown recently enjoyed liberty during a port visit here. The stop is the first liberty port 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) personnel visited since departing the Fifth Fleet in late January for an early trip home to San Diego.

Marines and sailors flooded the streets of Darwin during the visit Feb. 4-8, taking full advantage of being away from the iron-clad vessel and

vast ocean, which many have been accustomed to since leaving Jebel Ali, United Arab Emirates, in late December. Many decided to spend their hard-earned deployment pay to sleep in a hotel room in the city.

“Spending the night out in town gave me the opportunity to take a real shower and sleep in a real bed, as opposed to a rack that I can barely fit in,” said Staff Sgt. Monica Brooks, 13th MEU (SOC) Command Element Nuclear, Biological and Chemical chief.

Along with spending the night in the city, many took the opportunity to volunteer their time reaching out to the local community by participating in a one-day community relations project coordinated by the MEU chaplain and his assistant.

According to Petty Officer 2nd Class Bien V. Duong, 13th MEU Command Element chaplain’s assistant, MEU personnel participated in six different community relations projects in different parts of the city.

The projects involved landscaping,

painting and cleaning of several of the city’s schools and churches, and preparing and serving meals at a homeless shelter.

While some were volunteering to clean the place up, other MEU Marines along with Germantown and Peleliu personnel got a little dirty during several friendly games of rugby with local teams.

VPU-2 flight engineer soars to milestone

MCB HAWAII, KANEOHE BAY, Hawaii — The flight line here was a welcome sight to a Patrol Squadron 2 senior chief flight engineer as his P-3 Orion descended, successfully logging his 10,000th flight hour, Feb. 1.

When Senior Chief Mike Allen reached a “year in the air,” or 8,060 hours aloft, in August 2002, he never imagined that the next big milestone for aviators was less than two years away.

Airmen from VPU-2, family members and well-wishers were on hand to congratulate Allen on his entrance into the “10,000 Club.”

Receiving a certificate and lapel pin from Lockheed Martin Corporation for his achievement, Allen was congratulated by all present before cutting a cake commemorating the flight.

“Flight engineers are incredibly valuable to a flight crew and pilot,” said Lt. Cmdr. Eric Seib, a P-3 pilot with VPU-2. “Their expertise is unquestionable, especially if anything ever goes wrong with the aircraft.”

Allen didn’t expect to hit the mark before he left flight status for good.

“I figured my flying career would be over long before I hit that mark,” said Allen. “We’re not flying the P-3s as much as we used to, but with more going on, we’ve gotten to be more active.”

Major receives Bronze Star for actions

MCB CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — Major David B. Sosa was awarded a Bronze Star with combat distinguishing device here Jan. 23 for courageous actions while serving with the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, Task Force Tarawa during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

While completing his tasks as battalion operations officer, the command post came under fire and Sosa’s command and control vehicle was lost.

Disregarding his own safety he directed the battalion staff to clear all the radios of important information, collect sensitive equipment and coordinate a rally point while taking direct small arms and rocket propelled grenade fire, according to the Bronze Star citation.

Assisting in the defense of the forward command post and being continuously exposed to enemy fire he remained focused on the mission,

providing an example for other Marines to follow, the citation continued.

Seeing the Marines use their training and remain focused on the mission at hand is what you want to see, Sosa said, his athletic five-foot-nine frame swelling with pride with these words. “It was amazing seeing what they were able to do.”

“A little bit of stress in a combat environment can spiral out of control. Maj. Sosa was the calming voice in the storm,” said Capt. Michael A. Brooks, division staff secretary, 2nd Marine Division.

The first transmissions from the forward units were erratic and the Marines were excited, he explained. Sosa got on the radio and lead the unit through their first engagement. His efforts gave the Marines what they needed to fight and win that day.

Estrada visits personnel, facilities of GTEP

KRTSANISI, Georgia — Sgt. Maj. John L. Estrada, 15th Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps, visited the Marines, soldiers and sailors of Task Force Georgia Train and Equip Program Feb. 4 after visiting Marines at Marine Forces Europe, Bosnia and the Georgian Embassy.

Estrada toured the American and Georgian facilities at Krtsanisi 9/11 training area as well as the Kodjori training area on his one-day visit. He also dined and spoke with the Marines, soldiers and sailors of Task Force GTEP.

“You are embarked on a very, very important mission,” Estrada told the group of GTEP personnel gathered in the camp chow hall to hear him speak.

“I’d like to personally thank you for your service,” he said, referring to the audiences’ dedication to their respective branch of service as well as to their country.

He asked that each service member thank their family on his behalf for their selfless sacrifice and support.

Estrada discussed the coming deployments to Iraq and various troop rotations. He explained the necessity for seven-month rotations in Iraq as well as the increased operational tempo the Marines would encounter once they returned to the U.S.

While touring the Georgian facilities, Estrada spoke with a platoon commander preparing his unit—the 16th Mountain Battalion—for deployment to Iraq to assist the U.S. with the Global War on Terrorism.

“This will be a memorable experience for you and your men,” Estrada said.

Thunderbolts leave for Cope Tiger

MCAS IWAKUNI, Japan — Marine (All-Weather) Fighter Attack Squadron 251 started preparing for their first deployment from Iwakuni during their Western Pacific deploy-

ment Feb. 6.

The Thunderbolt’s first deployment is to Korat, Thailand, for Operation Cope Tiger. The four-week training evolution is a multilateral exercise involving militaries from Thailand, Singapore and the United States.

“Cope Tiger is a two-part exercise,” said Maj. Mathew E. Tolliver, VMFA-251 operations officer. “It will involve a command post exercise and flying training exercise.”

Cope Tiger’s mission is to improve combat readiness in a combined force exercise while also enhancing security relations, demonstrate and support security in the region, according to Tolliver.

There are many objectives set forth for Cope Tiger including maintenance of military to military relations, conducting a safe, accident free exercise, combining command post and training and improving unit proficiency, according to Tolliver.

“We as a unit also have objectives for Cope Tiger,” Tolliver said. “Pilot upgrades including mission commander, division lead, section lead and core proficiency are some of those.”

The Thunderbolts, along with other units from the station, will be operating out of Korat Royal Thai Air Base.

Unit responds to ricin scare, secures buildings

WASHINGTON — For the first time since the 2001 anthrax attacks, a team of the Marine Corps’ Chemical Biological Incident Response Force was called into action Feb. 3.

A 161-member team, headquartered at Indian Head, Md., responded to a call from the capitol police, after a postal worker at the Dirksen Senate Office Building found ricin in a mail sorter Feb. 2.

Ricin, a highly toxic chemical derived from the castor bean, was found in a mailroom in the office of Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn.

The Marines received the word to deploy at their morning formation and within an hour were on the way.

Upon arriving at the site, the team joined capitol police and other authorities and combed through more than 120 55-gallon drums of unopened mail. Meanwhile, other authorities kept workers clear of the south side of the fourth floor of the Dirksen building.

Marines entered the buildings wearing Level B Tyvek protective suits, so if they did find other contaminated sites, they would be safe.

Aside from the capitol building, the CBIRF team also had to search through the Russell and Hart buildings, the Library of Congress, four House offices and the Botanical Gardens administration headquarters. No other contaminated areas were found.

Compiled by the MCRD
Parris Island Public Affairs
Office

Knock, knock ...



Mark Turney

MCB QUANTICO, Va. – Working as a team, two Marines, one from Kilo Co., 3rd Bn., 25th Marine Regiment, and one from the 31st Co., Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, assault a building at the rear end of the Military Operations on Urban Terrain site during an interoperable training evolution Jan. 18 to Feb. 2.

Shark bait ...



Cpl. Andrew Williams

CURACAO, Netherlands Antilles --Lance Cpl. Justin McCrory of Kilo Co., 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment traverses a single rope for 60 meters over water in the fifth event of the Nassau Run, a test of endurance and teamwork. McCrory and other Marines took part in Dutch Bilat I, and trained with their counterparts from the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps.